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SUBJECT: BOSNIA - SNSD CALLS FOR RIGHT TO REFERENDUM

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: In an interview with Republika Srpska (RS) wire service SRNA, RS PM Milorad Dodik on August 1 stated that the RS would condition its future participation in constitutional reform talks to the inclusion of a specific provision in the constitution granting the RS the right to hold a referendum at a specified future date. Later the same day, Dodik's SNSD party issued a press release echoing his remarks to SRNA and adding that the continued existence of the RS Police will be a condition for RS participation in police reform talks. This marks the first time that Dodik or his party have called for a referendum in writing. It is also suggests a hardening of the SNSD position on police reform. With many political leaders out of the country for the August holidays and new High Representative in office, Dodik may be testing to see how far he can push the envelope in advance of the resumption of political talks in September.
END SUMMARY

Dodik on Referenda - The Montenegro Model

12. (SBU) During an August 1 interview with RS media outlet SRNA, PM Milorad Dodik stated that SNSD would not agree to any new constitutional reform talks unless RS citizens "are allowed to later voice their opinion in a referendum on the validity of the changes." Specifically, Dodik called for a constitutional amendment permitting a referendum within three to five years for citizens to voice their opinions on the effectiveness of the new constitution. "If it is proved that a decision on the Constitution is not right, citizens should search for their own way," Dodik said. Dodik raised the constitution of the Former Serbia and Montenegro and its provision for an independence referendum by Montenegrin citizens and suggested a similar provision should be included in the Bosnian constitution.

13. (U) Dodik went on to discuss police reform talks promised by the High Representative for September. "For us, the RS is more important than Bosnia and Herzegovina and the RS police are more important to us than European integration," Dodik said. He questioned the utility of further negotiations with Federation based politicians and that, although he would return to the talks, he saw little benefit in doing so for the RS, claiming that the goal of Silajdzic and others is "not a more functional Bosnia and Herzegovina but a Bosnia without the RS." He added that Silajdzic and other Federation-based leaders are "doing a very good job for us who are sitting here and patiently waiting for you to prove that BiH can not function."

¶4. (U) Later the same day, SNSD headquarters in Banja Luka issued a press release that summarized Dodik's interview statements. The release reads:

SNSD shall participate in talks on constitutional changes only provided that text of the new constitution shall explicitly stipulate the possibility of holding referendum within three to five years at which the citizens would express themselves on such constitutional solution as a basis of joint efforts to build democratic, decentralized, and European BiH.

Referendum as a constitutional category is a signal that state structures and all political subjects permanently have an obligation to build feeling of safety, equality, and dignity of Republika Srpska and its citizens within BiH. That, at the same time, means that daily pressures on Republika Srpska to give up on its original Dayton and constitutional competencies have to stop as well as constant semi-legal and unconstitutional establishing the so-called state institutions with unitary competencies. At the same time, SNSD hereby announces its explicit position that Police of Republika Srpska shall be the condition for all talks on police reform in BiH.

In this way, SNSD does not want to undermine talks and reforms, but it insists that they are conducted on Dayton and constitutional internationally verified and guaranteed basis and wants to clearly present stands of Republika Srpska.

Comment

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¶5. (SBU) Dodik's recent comments have, for the first time, linked the SNSD position on constitutional and police reforms with his more problematic statements on referenda. Although RSNA conclusions passed in April also called for a referendum in the context of police reform, the August 1 interview and press release are the first such statements with Dodik's explicit imprimatur. The tactic of issuing a party press release is also new as it provides Dodik with far less room to disavow his statements as he frequently does after making controversial pronouncements. Dodik may be testing the international community, particularly the new High Representative, while the summer holiday season has diverted the attention of many Bosnians from politics.
MCELHANEY